

## Teacher Test to Determine “Highly Qualified” Status

Challenge: Teachers hired into a Title I program must meet the “highly qualified” requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 before hire. While teachers with prior teaching experience may meet the standard through several routes, including the criteria outlined in the state’s “House Rules,” elementary teachers new to the profession have only one option to demonstrate competency. That option is to take the state’s designated content test. Because South Dakota’s designated test will not be ready until the fall of 2004, the state requested a waiver from USDOE to allow Title I schoolwide and targeted assistance programs to hire teachers who meet the state’s requirements for certification but who have not had the opportunity to take a state test. At this time, no response has been received from USDOE concerning the request for a waiver.

Solution: To meet the demands of Title I programs that are in the process of recruiting staff and need to issue contracts, DOE has devised a plan to help teachers and Title I schools meet this requirement in the event that the waiver is not granted. Here are the details on the plan:

- Elementary teachers new to the profession who wish to be hired in a Title I program may take the PRAXIS II exam for elementary teachers here in South Dakota in August.
- Each exam will be scored, but there will be no “pass” or “fail.” The teacher will receive the score; however, the state will not set a cut score to determine “pass” or “fail.”
- Therefore, the act of taking the test will be enough to meet the requirement. A new teacher who takes the test will be deemed “highly qualified.”
- The only test that will be available in August in South Dakota is the Praxis II exam for elementary teachers.
- Middle and high school teachers new to the profession who want to work in Title I programs/schools have an additional option for meeting the “highly qualified” requirements. A teacher new to the profession who has a major in the area assigned to teach (i.e. math, biology, etc.) will meet the requirements for the status of “highly qualified.”

Districts who wish to hire teachers new to the profession into their Title I targeted assistance program or as a teacher of a core content subject in a schoolwide program should proceed to immediately inform potential hires of the availability of the elementary test in South Dakota in August. Paying the test fees for recruits who may

be hired into the Title I program is an appropriate use of the district's Title II PART A — Improving Teacher Quality Program funds.

Logistics of the test administration (time, date, location) are being worked out with the vendor, Educational Testing Service (ETS). It appears that the testing date will be in August. We hope to open three testing centers in different parts of the state so that it is convenient for newly-certified teachers to take the test.

The teachers themselves will need to register with ETS for the test. A supply of official forms will be made available as soon as we have them. Watch for additional information very soon—we will notify all districts as soon as we have updates. State universities will also be informed of the availability of the test that they can assist in getting information to new elementary education graduates who may be considering jobs in Title I schools/programs.

The department appreciates the patience of district administrators and teacher graduates as we have strategized to meet this challenge during the past few months. It is our hope that this solution will resolve the many concerns our Title I programs have had due to the “highly qualified” requirement.